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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

Senior Review Panel

NIC-05182-84
10 September 1984

MEMORANDUM FOR: Chairman, National Intelligence Council

SUBJECT: Senior Review Panel Examination of Several
Estimative Products from the First Halves of
1982 and 1983

Purpose of Study

1. In response to your request, the Senior Review Panel undertook a sampling of estimative products published by the National Intelligence Council during the first six months of 1982 and the equivalent period of 1983. You asked that the Panel address, in particular, two questions:

- How well do the projections stand up in the light of subsequent events?
- How useful, in our view, were the papers to the policymaking community?

2. The field of inquiry was thus the four NIEs and 17 SNIEs published in the first half of 1982 and the 12 NIEs and 13 SNIEs published in the first half of 1983.

Main Findings

3. Annexes to this memorandum contain our specific comments. Our main summary conclusions are:

- a. • 1982-1983 estimative production was of extremely high quality in forecast validity and policymaker utility. Of the 46 NIEs and SNIEs published in the two semestral periods, 45 met--or are meeting--acceptably severe standards of estimative dependability.

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b. There was only one failed estimate in the two half-years--

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c. The high estimative performance of 1982 was maintained in 1983 with an appreciable increase in quantity.

d. For the most part, 1982 and 1983 production would--in our experience--have met most policymaker needs in timeliness, policy issue relevance, analytical quality, readability, and estimative judgment. Actual use made is, perhaps, a separate question and one beyond the scope of our study. Overall, as policymaking support, we would regard two-thirds to three-quarters of the papers as "Superior to Outstanding," with the percentage rising as one moves from 1982 to 1983.

e. Length of preparation/coordination time bore little, if any, relation to quality of finished product. Granted special response factors to high priority estimative requests, there seemed in these two years an almost inverse relation: the quicker the response, the better the product.

f. Improvements in quality are still--and probably always will be--possible. We cite a number of these in the concluding section to this memorandum.

Section of the Sample

4. As indicated, our summary findings derive from a review of all the NIEs/SNIEs published in the two periods. We selected, as requested, a smaller sample for more intensive study on the basis of the following criteria: (a) the projective time frame of each had to be sufficiently short-term to permit a valid comparison with our perceptions of subsequent "ground truth" twenty-four and twelve months later; (b) the ultimate sample needed to be broadly representative of the diversity of NIC output and large enough to be statistically significant, taking into account the increased production of 1983 over 1982; and (c) subsequent Community and Agency analyses were available to test validity half-lives.

5. The sample which emerged comprised the following 12 NIEs/SNIEs. Our individual comments are attached as case studies at the indicated Tabs:

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Methodology

6. The estimates themselves were of course our primary source. Additionally, we requested computer runs of Agency holdings of finished and unfinished intelligence bearing on subsequent events and trends. From these we selected for detailed study what we believed pertinent to our inquiry, numbering from two to three dozen for some estimates to several hundred for others. All Panel members reviewed all retrieved documents. In some cases we found it necessary, as our work progressed, to request papers published prior to the estimates. Finally, our judgments necessarily reflect our own recollections and impressions of the passage of events since the issuance of

the estimates forming the sample. We have tried to discipline this subjectivity, as indicated, by the production record.

Concluding Observations

7. As indicated above, estimative production in the two periods reviewed seemed to us of an impressively high quality. Quantity also increased. With few exceptions the estimates were timely. They addressed issues of policy importance. They would have been, again with a few exceptions, of value to decisionmakers. And the majority provided predictions which were perceptive and which have been validated by subsequent events.

8. In our view, it is also true that length remains a problem, and that too much of the burden of concision may now be carried by the Key Judgments. Within generally excellent estimates, individual findings are at times more discursive and fuzzy than rigorous thinking would abide. There are persistent tendencies to hedge bets without giving the reader a feel for the odds on--often implicit or casually developed--alternative outcomes. And Community practice regarding dissenting footnotes on major issues may need a further look. In particular, their rationale appears to need fuller development in the text--perhaps with an opportunity for a one-round rejoinder--and additional highlighting in the Key Judgments. At the end, clarity of aim, brevity of expression, and a decent respect for man's imponderables remain the cardinal virtues.

9. The distribution of this report has been limited as noted.

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Attachments:

Tabs A through L

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